

July 17, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Stay Focused on what Jesus gives to us!

You've gotta feel a bit for Martha. How would you react if Jesus stopped by in the flesh at dinner time? You would want to give him the best meal you could. Martha was working hard to get the meal ready - baking fresh bread, getting spices and herbs, figs and grapes, etc. As she was working frantically to get things ready, she could hear her younger sister, Mary, chatting with Jesus in the next room. That did not seem fair to Martha. Ideally, she would have politely said, "Excuse me. Mary, could you please give me a hand in the kitchen?" The harder Martha worked and the more she heard Mary talking with Jesus, the more upset she got. Finally Mount Martha erupted. **"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"** You could have heard a pin drop. Oh dear. She just yelled at God and told him what to do.

As Jesus calmed Martha down, he did not suggest that she was doing anything wrong by preparing a meal. They needed to eat. Mary, however, had **"chosen what is better."** Having food in your belly does not really mean too much if you do not have Jesus in your heart. It's a matter of priorities and focus. Martha was focused on what she was doing as if it was the most important thing.

Focusing on what we do comes very easy. Pastors easily slip into thinking, "There were no typos in the bulletin. The hymns were great. I had my sermon memorized and never stuttered. It was a good morning." That is a bad focus. The blessings of worship do not depend on the pastor. The blessings of worship all come from our Lord. The pastor is just the delivery boy. If the UPS delivery guy gives you a package that you needed from a friend, the credit goes to your friend, not the delivery man. Certainly, the delivery man finds joy in making someone happy, just as a pastor finds joy to see people rejoicing in Jesus as their Savior. Still, the pastor is just the delivery boy. Every time we walk into this room, the angels in the stained-glass windows remind us that this room is all about Word and Sacrament.

It is also easy for those sitting in the pews to focus on what they do. How would you reply if I asked you, "How is your relationship going with God? How close are you to Jesus?" Our natural reaction would be to say, "Not bad. I'm in church. That's more than most people can say." Or, "It could be better. I read my devotions, but not every day." Notice how those answers focus on

what we do. We keep focusing on ourselves and on what we do. As a believer, your relationship with Jesus is excellent because Jesus is excellent, not because of anything we do or try to do.

In case you have not noticed, I am a word nerd. I am fascinated with the history of words (like how the word "breakfast" comes from breaking your fast). I am always analyzing the way people talk and the phrases they use. When someone asks, "When are your worship services?" I have to bite my tongue. I want to say, "That's redundant. Our worship is service and our service is worship. Worship service is saying the same thing twice." The German word for worship is "*Gottesdienst*," roughly translated as Divine Service, or God's service, or the service of God, which can have a double meaning. It can mean service that comes from God to us, or service that we give to God. Both are true, of course, but the service that comes from God is the most important. There are two arrows in worship – from God to us and from us to God. God's arrow is much larger than ours. He downloads forgiveness, holiness, peace, joy, patience, salvation, etc. into your hearts from his throne of grace. And we, like children on Christmas morning, can't help but to be excited and thankful. We respond to God's love with our prayers, our praises, the way we wear our better clothes when we come to meet God in his house, our offerings, our volunteering to help with this ministry, etc. That is how we show the Lord our love and thanks. But our primary focus always needs to be on what God has done for us, not what we do for God.

Think of a couple who is engaged to be married. They get together on Friday night for a fish fry. As they eat, they chat about their wedding plans. Was the cake ordered yet? Check. Does the photographer know what time to arrive? Check. Etc. They chat about how wonderful it will be when they are married and can say good night without saying good-bye. And as she goes on and on about the bridesmaids' dresses and how bad it was at work yesterday, he just keeps staring and listening and smiling. He finds joy in hearing her voice. Even when she's complaining, he is pleased that she trusts him enough to share her frustrations with him. She is looking to him as her protector and provider. That's what happens when we worship. We are talking to Jesus, our Heavenly Bridegroom. We talk to him about our troubles. We thank him for all he has done for us. We look forward to being together with him forever in heaven. Worship is a dialogue between Jesus, the Heavenly Bridegroom and us, his bride. Jesus is the perfect protector and provider. We are going to stay focused on him.

Our order of worship is not just a tradition or a style. It is not a song and dance routine to get people excited to give their hearts and their wallets to

God. Our order of worship gives order and structure to our dialogue with God so we don't focus on our pet issues and remember to stay focused on the most important issue of salvation. Notice the pattern. We start with a hymn which reminds us of our relationship with God. We know that we are sinners and do not deserve to stand in his presence and so we confess our sins. As God's delivery boy, I announce the good news that you are forgiven. We pray, "Lord, have mercy," as we think of God's kingdom across the world and here in our congregation. We sing a song of praise thanking him for salvation and then we pray that he would take care of us. As God's messenger boy, I read a section of the Bible – God's love letter to you. We respond by singing a psalm – a hymn that God wrote – as we chew on his message and savor his goodness. I read more of God's love letter to you. The sermon is an explanation and application of one of the lessons. We confess our faith which has been strengthened through the Word. We pray for his blessings. Then we remind ourselves of the importance of the Lord's Supper as we prepare to receive Christ's body and blood – tangible proof of our forgiveness, tangible proof that through faith we are in Jesus and that he is in us. And so the dialogue continues until I extend God's blessing to you as you go back into the world and put your faith into practice. The dialogue of worship is a beautiful thing.

Maybe you remember those old Star-Kist Tuna commercials. Charlie is a cartoon tuna fish who wears a tuxedo, or plays a grand piano or has an expensive painting. He is hoping that he will meet the standards of Star-Kist and be chosen by them. The tuxedo or grand piano or painting is his way of proving that he has good taste. At the end of each commercial, he always gets the message, "Sorry Charlie. Star-Kist doesn't want tuna with good taste. They want tuna that tastes good." We could tweak that advertising phrase to say, "The Lord does not want people who look like believers. The Lord wants people who are believers." Yes, God wants to hear your songs of praise, he wants to hear your prayers, he wants to receive your offerings and efforts, but more than anything else, God wants your heart. He wants you to look to him in faith through which he gives you all of the blessings he promises in his Word. The Lord finds his greatest delight in serving you with the banquet of salvation.

Martha obviously crossed a line when she lost her temper and yelled at Jesus. She was more focused on what she was doing for Jesus than what Jesus was doing for her. For her selfish focus, Jesus could have sent her to hell to howl in agony forever. Instead, when Martha was frazzled trying to serve Jesus, Jesus served her. He calmly replied, "**Martha, Martha.....**" He taught her what was most important. "Martha, thank you for your hard work to prepare

the meal. We'll eat soon. It's OK if we eat a few minutes later than you wanted. But you need to remember, Martha, that having me as your Savior is more important than this meal." None of us can get rid of our sinful guilt and escape hell unless we have Jesus as our Savior. Jesus did not treat Martha as her sins deserved and he does not treat us as our sins we deserve. His mercies are new every morning. He gives you for more than you could ever give him.

Think of it! The Ruler of the universe, your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, prepares the banquet of salvation for you and serves it to you as if he was a waiter serving you in a five-star restaurant. It does not cost you a thing because Jesus paid for it with his life. He gives you a fancy plate with a large portion of love, a giant scoop of forgiveness, a generous serving of mercy with a helping of angel protection on the side, a casserole of comfort and compassion, with the sweet drink of peace and joy. It is all yours for free. No matter what your sin, no matter how embarrassing, no matter how shameful, no matter how secret, no matter how often, Jesus will not stop loving you. That is what we want to stay focused on. If we could only prioritize time with God's Word in our homes and hear at church as much as we prioritize our meals. As King David wrote in Psalm 34, "**Taste and see that the Lord is good.**"

I like to think that Dr. Luke interviewed Martha and Mary as he researched Jesus' ministry. I am sure they both remembered that time when Martha yelled at Jesus as she was getting supper ready. I am guessing that Martha was a little embarrassed by the memory. I also like to think that she told Luke to include that story so that future generations, including you and I, could take the lesson to heart. Certainly, as God's delivery boy, I am going to strive to get the good news of salvation to you in worship, sermons and Bible classes. And you are going to strive to put your faith into practice at church and in your daily life. We want to show the Lord our love and thanks. But we will especially stay focused on what Jesus gives us. Amen.